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# Scholarly Communication - the Australian Experience

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# The beginnings of the Scholarly Communication

## Movement in Australia

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The 1993 Conference, "*Changes in Scholarly Communications Patterns: Australia and the Electronic Library*", held in Canberra, brought together for the first time in an Australian context the various players in the scholarly communication chain. The spectrum of attendees ranged from authors to publishers, subscription agents to network experts, and librarians to copyright facilitators. In hindsight, the 1993 Conference can be seen as a significant milestone and a catalyst for significant joint action in the area of scholarly communication in the Australian context.

As identified by Mulvaney and Steele (1993) in their preface to the Conference Proceedings, there had been a number of important background events which provided the imperious for the organising of that landmark 1993 Conference. In particular, the release of an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation study, "*University Libraries and Scholarly Communication*" (Cummings et al., 1992) had influenced thinking among some key players. This study highlighted the international issues impacting on scholarly communication.

Mulvaney (then Secretary of the Australian Academy of the Humanities) and Steele (University Librarian at The Australian National University) are personally credited with the idea for the 1993 Conference and with using the auspices of the Australian Academy of the Humanities to effect the 1993 Conference. The Australian Academy of the Humanities had previously sponsored a workshop in February 1992 attended by members of the Joint Academies' Committee on Libraries and invited participants. That meeting resolved to seek the endorsement of the Consultative Committee of the Australian Academies for an approach to government for funding.

The Australian Academies comprises the four learned Academies:

- the Australian Academy of the Humanities
- the Australian Academy of Science
- the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
- the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering

While these four Academies are independent entities, spanning the spectrum of tertiary education and research, collectively they represent an impressive forum of diverse expertise which the 1993 Conference organisers felt offered an appropriate forum for discussion and debate. Following endorsement by the Consultative Committee of the Australian Academies, the Australian Academy of the Humanities was appointed to facilitate the Conference. Funding for the Conference was secured from the National Board and Higher Education Council, through the Federal Government's then Department of Employment, Education and Training.

In addition to gathering the key players together for the first time in an Australian context, the 1993 Conference provided the occasion for the Federal Government to announce the allocation of \$5 million from its National Priority Reserve Fund for the period 1994-1996 (Mulvaney and Steele, 1996, p11). These additional funds were intended to advance projects directed towards achieving system-wide benefits and, ideally projects which had the potential to advance significantly the capability of university libraries to provide high quality and more cost effective services.

The funding announcement, made by the Hon Ross Free, MP, speaking on behalf of the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training the Hon Kim Beazley, during the opening speech of the 1993 Conference, provided a very strong incentive for follow-up action. The action which flowed is, in part, the story told in this paper.

### **The birth of the National Scholarly Communications Forum (NSCF)**

Charged with success from the 1993 Conference, organisers and key players met later that year to discuss and determine any follow-up action. This meeting led directly to the formation of the NSCF which over the coming years was to act as significant forum for debate and discussion of issues effecting the scholarly communications chain.

The October 1993 meeting was chaired by Professor A.A. Martin and in addition to representatives from the four Learned Academies, the following organisations were then represented:

Council of Australian State Librarians (CASL)

Copyright Agency Limited (CAL)

Australian Council of Library and Information Services (ACLIS)

Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)

Council of Australian Director of Information Technology (CAUDIT)

Australian Society of Authors (ASA)

Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL)

Australian Book Publishing Association (ABPA)

## National Library of Australia (NLA)

That meeting discussed among other things how the bodies represented could "continue as a force". (NSCF files, 12/10/93)

From this meeting the realisation that the rapid changes occurring in electronic communication demanded constant monitoring and dissemination of information led to the formation of the NSCF.

In addition, the NSCF determined to continue with a series of Round Table meetings and mechanisms were put in place to effect the organising of these meetings.

While the NSCF has no formal terms of reference, as a result of October 1993 meeting, it had a clear agenda and purpose for the core group's continuation as a confederation (NSCF and author, private correspondence, 30/4/97). The NSCF was born.

The NSCF was formally launched via a media release in February 1994. In January 1995 (ASSA Newsletter, January 1995, pp. 36-37) the membership of the NSCF was then reported as follows:

Australian Social Sciences Academy

Australian Academy of Technology, Science & Engineering

Australian Academy of Science

Australian Academy of Humanities

Australian Publishing & Booksellers Association

Australian Council of Libraries & Information Service

Australian Library & Information Association

Australian Society of Authors

Council of Australian University Director's of Information Technology  
Copyright Agency Limited

Council of Australian State Librarians

Council of Australian University Librarians

Internet Society

National Library of Australia

## **Round Table meetings**

Round Table meetings organised under the auspices of the NSCF were organised by different convening bodies from each of the participating members.

### **Round Table meeting no 1: Scholarly Publishing (August 1994)**

Round Table meeting No. 1 on Scholarly Publishing was organised on behalf of the NSCF by ALIA and ACLIS and held in Canberra in August 1994.

According to the invitation to attendees the Round Table sought *"To Discuss Critical Issues in Scholarly Publishing, Particularly in Relation to the Impact of the Convergence of Telecommunication and Computing Technologies"*. International and local speakers gave presentations and there was an emphasis during the proceedings on debate and discussion.

Ann Okeron, Director of the Office of Scholarly and Academic Publishing, Association of Research Libraries in the United States of America, spoke about changes in scholarly publishing from an international perspective.

Professor James O'Donnell, Department of Classical Studies, University of Pennsylvania, also spoke at the Round Table.

### **Round Table meeting no 2: Public Access to Networked Information (October 1994).**

Round Table meeting No. 2 on Public Access to Networked Information was organised on behalf of the NSCF by the NLA and held in Canberra in October 1994.

According to the invitation to attendees the Round Table sought *"To Bring Together Organisations and Individuals who are Active in the Development of Policy or Projects Which Relate to Issues of Linking People in our Community to Information Sources and Service, through Communication Networks"*. The Round Table aimed 'at achieving desirable outcomes in the development of new policy, through the exchange of experiences between those who are developing policy and those who are involved in providing the service'.

This Round Table had an impressive list of local speakers. A total of 18 Recommendations covering Policy and Regulation and Government Service were formulated by the Discussions Groups during the course of the Round Table.

### **Round Table meeting no 3: Intellectual Property Issues in a Networked Information Environment (June 1995).**

Round Table meeting No. 3 on Intellectual Property Issues in a Networked Information Environment was organised on behalf of the NSCF by CAL and held in Sydney in June 1995.

According to the invitation to attendees the Round Table was designed *"To Bring Together Intellectual Property Owners and Users Active in Communicating Scholarly Information through Communication Networks"*.

As with Round Table 1, the emphasis was on debate and exchange of views. The keynote address was given by The Hon. Duncan Kerr, then Minister for Justice, who spoke about Intellectual Property Issues in a Network Information Environment, (Kerr, 1995).

#### **Round Table meeting no 4: The Future of Academic Publishing (February 1996).**

Round Table meeting No. 4 The Future of Academic Publishing was organised on behalf of the NSCF by the Australian Academy of the Humanities and held in Canberra in February 1996.

According to the invitation to attendees the Round Table Provided the opportunity *"For the Publishing Industry to Explain to Authors and Teachers What it Costs to Originate and Publish Complex Books"*.

Unlike the previous Round Tables, it was intended partly as a 'fact-gathering exercise' as well as an arena for discussion.

Given this brief, its to be expected that many of the speakers came from the commercial publishing industry. Sir Gustav Nossal provided the Keynote address entitled *Monographs, polygraphs, papers or multi-media? How to publish and perish in the 21st Century'*.

Emanating from this Round Table is an impressive publication (McCalman, 1996) which when viewed collectively provides a valuable reference source about the impact of new communication and copying technologies on the face of academic publishing and traditional academic book selling.

#### **Round Table meeting no 5: Information, Innovation and Scholarly Communication (October 1996).**

Round Table meeting No. 5 on Information, Innovation and Scholarly Communication was organised on behalf of the NSCF by the CAUL and held in Canberra in October 1996.

According to the invitation to attendees the Round Table "*Brings Together those Responsible for the Policy, Planning and Implementation of Australia's Scholarly Communication Infrastructure*".

Significant among the speakers and attendees at this Round Table was a delegation from the United Kingdom. The delegation comprised representatives from bodies such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), and included:

Professor Michael Anderson, Member of the Follett Review Group

Professor John Arbuthnott, Chair of JISC

Ms Lynn Brindley,

Professor Mel Collier,

Professor Brian Fender,

Mr Derek Law

Dr Malcolm Read.

The participation of this delegation permitted a review of Government activities and funding in the United Kingdom and facilitated a comparison with Australia.

As a consequence of the Joint Funding Councils' Library Review conducted by Sir Brian Follett in 1993, significant allocations have been made to the development of the infrastructure considered necessary to support the information needs of the British scholarly community. This support has included the development of the communication networks, Janet and SuperJanet; consortium provision of datasets; exploration of initiatives such as electronic publishing and the encouragement of information literacy training.

These initiatives have been largely paralleled in Australia, although with significantly less resources. While some of the activities have been funded through the Australian Research Council (ARC) Infrastructure grants, the main co-ordination has been through the Standing Committee on Information Resources (SCIR) established by the Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee (AVCC). It is this body that has overseen the expenditure of the original \$5 million announced at the 1993 Conference.

As at previous Round Table meetings there were often related, but non NSCF spin-offs from such meetings. For example, the occasion was used by the AVCC to launch its Discussion Paper, *Exploiting Information technology in higher Education: An Issues Paper* (1996). While CAUL and the NLA released a jointly prepared paper, *Australian Scholarly Information infrastructure: issues in resource sharing and development by Australian Universities* (1996). While there was no reason why these bodies could not have released their papers independently, it is significant that they both choose to coincide the release of their Paper with the Round Table meeting.

### **Round Table meeting no 6: Access to Government Information (March 1997).**

Round Table meeting No. 6 Access to Government Information was organised on behalf of the NSCF by the NLA and ACLIS and held in Canberra in March 1997.

Unlike other Round Tables which were by invitation only, this was a 'closed' meeting for NCSF members only. The Round Table comprised of short presentations from selected speakers, followed by discussion of issues.

At the time of writing little had been made available about the outcomes, if any, of this meeting.

### **Round Table meeting no 7: The Distributed National Collection (July 1997).**

Round Table No. 7 is planned for 17th July 1997 and is on the Distributed National Collection. Local and international speakers have been invited to this meeting.

### **The Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) Standing Committee on Information Resources (SCIR)**

Any detailed discussion of the role and associated activities of the AVCC SCIR is beyond the scope of this paper which concentrates on the activities and contribution of the NSCF. However, in this context it is necessary to overview a little about SCIR, as often the two bodies have common players and sometimes adjoining agendas, especially as these relate to infrastructure developments.

While Round Table No. 1 (the 1993 Conference) provided the impetus for the more formal establishment of the NSCF, it was also the occasion for the announcement of the \$5 million National Priority (Reserve) Funds to further the development of information infrastructures for Australian university libraries. SCIR, established in 1992, was used by the AVCC as the body through which these funds were expended and administered. AVCC becoming the nominated financial administer of the funds.

Over the three year period (1993-1996) SCIR identified the programs to be funded from the NP(R)F, allocated grant moneys to each according to projected expenditure, and had set up four working parties to administer the programs. These working parties covered the areas of network infrastructure, database access, CASMACH compliance and electronic publishing.

The formal terms of reference for SCIR are that as a Standing Committee of AVCC, SCIR provides close interaction between libraries and information technology services on combining administration and policy development relating to the



provision of both hard-copy and electronic information. Under this brief the SCIR is expected to :

- act as the co-ordinating and advisory body to the AVCC on university information resources and services, liaising with Commonwealth and State bodies with related terms of reference;
- develop co-operative mechanisms between universities in order to maximise access to information by the university community in the most efficient and cost-effective way.
- Such mechanisms should encompass:
  - (i) resources and their appropriate housing and preservation in all formats; and
  - (ii) delivery.
- Information provision is envisaged at all levels - research, teaching and administration.
- seek advice from specialist working groups on specific areas of activity, including:
  - libraries;
  - computing services; and
  - management information and systems development.
- consider such other matters as are referred to the Standing Committee by the AVCC or the AVCC Board of Directors.

Many within Australian university libraries contend that, unlike NSCF, SCIR has had limited success. It has often been seen, especially by university librarians, as a Committee in search of a mission. Such a claim could never be laid at the NSCF which clearly evolved to fill an identifiable vacuum to promote and foster informed debate and discussion.

SCIR on occasions, depending upon one's situation in the Australian higher education hierarchy, has been seen as either a device through which some Vice Chancellors (individually and/or collectively) seek to keep their chief librarians (again, both individually and collectively) in check. Alternatively, SCIR has been credited by some as the national co-ordinating mechanism designed to ensure that university librarians and directors of IT speak to each other and the vehicle through which national co-ordination of information infrastructure can be developed. Somewhere in the middle, is the recognition that someone or somebody had to administer and be accountable for the spending of \$5 million dollars in national infrastructure funding.

As a member of SCIR during 1996, the author asserts that she has seen occasions when SCIR has attempted to play and develop all of the roles described above. It is the author's personal view that mostly SCIR has been an inner club used to monitor funds expenditure and to advance the agenda and profile of some individual SCIR members. It is significant that SCIR maintains a closed Web site and tracking its deliberations through the public record is somewhat difficult. Membership changes annually and this in itself complicates the SCIR Agenda, as new members struggle to come to terms with the role of SCIR. However, usually membership includes individuals nominated through the AVCC Secretariat by individual Vice Chancellors and office holders from related bodies such as CAUL and CAUDIT. The author was a SCIR member in 1996.

Achievements from the infrastructure funding have been significant and one is left to ponder the question of whether or not Federal Government funding would ever have been obtained without the lobbying and presence of individuals who, over time became the driving force behind the birth of the NSCF. Nevertheless, the existence of SCIR alone was unlikely to guarantee the allocation of the funding. Individuals a little closer to the action are perhaps better placed to judge this than the author.

### **Contributions of the NSCF**

As noted by John Shipp the President of CAUL in correspondence to the NSCF Secretariat, the NSCF and the Round Tables in particular have made an important and continuing contribution to debate. By providing opportunities for a range of interested parties to meet and discuss issues, the NSCF is broadening the debate and involving policy and decision making, academics, librarians and other participants such as publisher and authors.

The Round Tables in themselves have contributed valuable publication records to help further the debate, allowed scholars, students and researchers to track this important and continuing debate. For example, according to NSCF records in excess of 500 copies of the Proceedings of the 1993 Conference were sold.

In summary, the NSCF has:

- provided the forum for debate and discussion at the national, and of late, an international level

- added to the scholarly record and helped to provide a more permanent record of the debate through its own publications

- in part, acted as a lobbying and sounding board for interested parties, including public policy administrators and decision makers.

- raised the profile of debate through stimulating media coverage of the issues involved. This was especially successful in relation to the Round Table meetings, where coverage through the commercial media was quite extensive, especially in papers like the Australian.

- by association, provided the atmosphere and circumstances through which related bodies could further advance the agenda within their own Terms of Reference. This is particularly true in the case of SCIR and CAUL. It was through the occasion of the Round Table No 5, for example, that the Canberra Connection was established by some key players within CAUL. In turn the links to the recent UK Resource Discovery Conference were built by CAUL and JISC.

Overall, while the NSCF remains without formal terms of reference and therefore it is somewhat difficult to measure their success, few would deny that the NSCF has not had some successes. The library and information industry within Australia remains

the richer for its establishment and its program of Round Table meetings. There is no doubt that debate of critical issues within the Australian context, and indeed now within the international context, has benefited from its existence.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Observations and personal views expressed in this paper come from the Author perspective and experiences as a member of the Council of Australian University Librarians (1992+), a participant in Round Tables 1 and 5, and member of SCIR (1996) and an avid follower of public policy development in relation to Australian Higher Education since about 1987.

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